

HISTORY OF FIRMS USING PERFINS

PRYCE JONES' – NEWTOWN

Rosemary Smith.

This history was obtained from the archives of Pryce Jones' via Kate Richardson. Thanks are due to this lady for sending me a comprehensive history by Elwyn V Jones dated 1997; photocopies of pages from The Montgomeryshire Express & Radnor Times, Newtown, January 13th 1920 which had a life history and report of Pryce Jones funeral; plus a history of The Royal Welsh Warehouse.

In the early 1800's, Newtown (Wales) was the centre of the flannel industry, comparable to Leeds (Yorkshire). In 1859 there were forty five manufacturers of flannel in Newtown, four of which ran large mills.

Pryce Jones was born in 1834, was apprenticed to a draper, John Davies. Davies became bankrupt and Pryce Jones moved into his shop. From these humble beginnings, Pryce Jones founded and developed the world's first successful large scale mail order firm, known throughout the world as "Pryce Jones". He was the pioneer of "shopping by post" and helped start the present day Parcel Post in 1883.

From 1861 he had "Pryce Jones" stalls at all the leading national and international exhibitions in Europe, America and Australia. This advertising, and the distinctions his goods won, spread his name and fame throughout the world.

In 1866 Queen Victoria sent her first order to Pryce Jones' and afterwards twice yearly. One of the earliest and most popular patrons of Pryce Jones' was Florence Nightingale. In 1862 a special width of flannel was manufactured, which became known as 'The Florence Nightingale Flannel'. More famous still was a rug, shawl and inflatable pillow all in one - the "Euklisia Rug". During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, an old print reads that many a German soldier owed his life to it during that campaign. It was the first "sleeping bag".

His first warehouse was at the Cross but it was becoming too small for his expanding business and in 1879 he had a new "Royal Welsh Warehouse" built opposite the Railway which had been completed in 1864. His goods could now be carried to all parts of the country and to ports for transportation to all corners of the world. So important had his parcel trade become that both the Cambrian Railways Company and the London and North Western Railway Company ran two special vans daily from Newtown to Euston.

In 1882 Pryce Jones was chosen as a prospective Conservative Candidate for Montgomery Borough and at a party dinner he was seated next to the Post Master General. Pryce Jones seized the opportunity and asked why a Parcel Post System was not used on similar lines to the letter post system. The Post Master General was taken with the idea, had a further meeting with Pryce Jones, and the idea went into being.

In 1887 The Royal Welsh Warehouse was extended by a flat roofed block but again, because of expanding business, the Warehouse was again extended in 1902. The immense trade generated by such large premises made it necessary to install a Post Office in this new block to accommodate the interests of the firm and the added business to the postal

authorities. For most of this period there was no less than a quarter of a million customers on the books of the firm.

In 1892 Pryce Jones' became a Limited Company. They were the first firm to start "Free Post", so widely used today. In their catalogue of 1909, customers were allowed to post their requests and a stamp was not needed.

Sir Pryce Pryce-Jones, aged 85, died on January 11th 1920 and was buried at Llanllwchaiarn. Members of the family continued to run the business. In 1938, Lewis's of Liverpool took over the Pryce Jones Company when the remaining Pryce-Jones family resigned as Board of Directors. Lewis' had been printing Pryce-Jones Catalogues since 1933. In 1953, Great Universal Stores purchased Pryce Jones Limited and the Royal Welsh Warehouse. The Warehouse is now owned by Kay & Co. ltd, Worcester, who ran their mail order firm from the top floor of this building.

Pryce Jones' were one of the earlier users of perfins. The first die, P2700.01 (P.J./N.T.) was used from 1871 to 1879. About 60 1d Plate numbers are known as well as the 1½d, 2d, 2½d & 4d of that period. In 1880, six different dies, P2680.01 - .03a (P.J/N.T) were brought into use. At this time it has not been possible to establish if these represent 2 different multi-headed dies but P2680.01-.2a were in use until 1900 and P2680.03 & .03a were in use for 5 years until 1885. In 1883 to 1885 a different die, P2678.01, PJ/NT without stops is known.

The only one of these dies which has been identified with a proving cover is P2680.01. The other seven are almost certainly used by Pryce Jones because of the '568' Newtown Duplex number or Newtown Post town found on the stamps.

In 1895 anew machine die was purchased, P2610.01M. This was "PJ" (T with serif) and this continued to be used until 1975. This die is a 4 headed multidie and Kate Richardson sent me an A4 size paper on which she had perforated 7 rows of this multi-head. The machine must still be in their archives.

